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The Fake Account for the Real Self

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A FAKE ACCOUNT FOR THE REAL SELF

FAKE + INSTAGRAM FINSTAGRAM

A finsta ethnography

By: Miranda Abrashi
Special Acknowledgements to Dr. Mary Erickson

“Finsta” Overview:

- Fake Instagrams or "finstas" have emerged predominantly within high school and college-age women.
- Private account (must request access to follow)
- Profile picture/biography unrelated to user behind it.
- Generally have fewer than 100 followers, due to the desire to control the audience that is allowed to view finsta content.

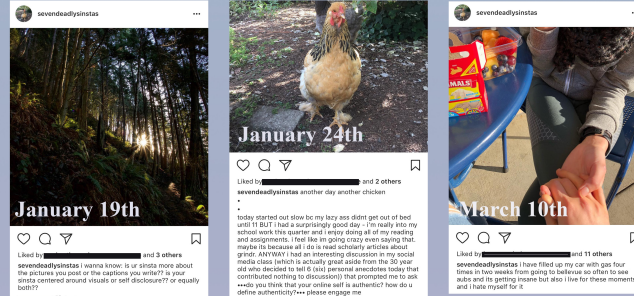
Ethnographic Experience

- The longer spent immersed in finsta culture, the more prevalent my findings became.
- Though my audience remained limited, my self-disclosure increased as I began using my finsta in an authentic way instead of a means to gather data.

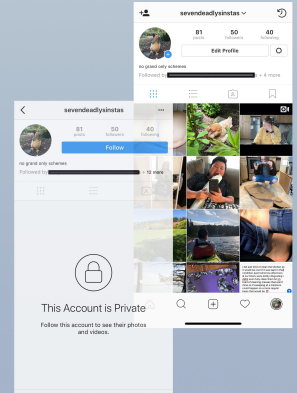
Research Question:

How does finsta culture give its users control, and how does that control allow users to feel like their privatized space is productive?

Ethnographic Exploration



Transition from observer-participant to participant-observer



Methods:

- Created a semi-anonymized Instagram account not associated with my face or name and set to private.
- I began following friends with finstas and branched out to begin following other finstas found through follower lists.
- First posts were centered around initial research disclosure and questions.
- My finsta use became more authentic as I began to post what I wanted instead of attempting to mirror what I was seeing.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

THROUGH OBSERVATION AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

Limited Audience

Balance of trust

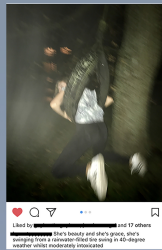
Breaking Social Rules

Users can post “authentic” content without the intention of “showing off”



Breaking Platform Rules

Users feel safer posting content that is not usually acceptable on other social media platforms



“I use it solely to show pictures/videos I took while partying (drunk or high)”

“Things for Instagram should be interesting to the wide public, while finstas don't have to be.”

“My finsta is more textually driven, I don't ever go into making a post with a picture I want to use in mind unless I'm posting a screenshot of something”

“I only let people who I trust follow me. I need to trust that they won't judge me for what I post or share it with others. I also try to limit the number of people who follow me to keep it more personal”

Self-Disclosure

Mutual and beneficial

One of the most common themes seen in almost all posts in some capacity
We crave intimacy and interpersonal relationships in a world where we engage with people online more than face to face - finstas allow users to self-disclose in a semi controlled/online environment



“I created my finsta because I wanted to post about things that I didn't want everyone to have access to”

Open Engagement

Users are aware of their own need for validation

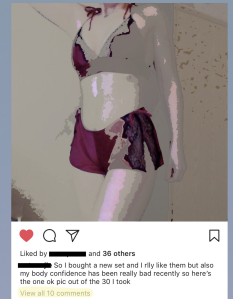
Users on all social media platforms engage in the platform for some level of validation

Finstas host activity and engagement from users who are often up front and transparent about their desire for validation

Q: “Why do yall post risky pics is it for fun? for self-confidence? for empowerment?”

A1: “all three”

A2: “Def all three, plus it keeps me from sending them to sleazy boys lol”



“Sometimes I post fun pictures I wouldn't post on other social media but then other times I take the time to write really long captions ranting about something that happened in my life”

Implications:

Observing behaviors within the confines of specific social media platforms gives important insight to some common themes among certain generations/demographics.

Individually these posts may not seem to have much meaning, but when looked at as aggregates of the previously listed overarching themes, they begin to hold more value.

Future research could explore these themes in greater depth, and try to evaluate what needs are being met for users, and why an online platform is host to this relatively new form of social media content.